

IV.—*A note on Capt. Beebe's Monograph of the Pheasants.*

By H. J. ELWES, F.R.S., M.B.O.U.

A WORK of this importance deserves a more extended notice than that given in the last number of 'The Ibis' (1918, p. 726), and as I have always been specially attracted by these splendid birds and have personal knowledge of many of them in their native haunts, I hope the following remarks may be found of interest.

It is, perhaps, a question which future authors and publishers would do well to consider, whether monographs so beautifully and artistically illustrated as this book, and which can only be published at an expense which most private ornithologists cannot afford, are desirable in the interests of science. Many of those who are wealthy enough to purchase such works are not ornithologists, and buy them for their illustrations only; many to whom the letterpress would be of permanent interest and value cannot afford to acquire the work. A second edition without the plates, or with the plates in a much cheaper form, cannot be produced with justice to the subscribers and purchasers of the original edition until that is completely sold out, which may not be for many years to come; but if the publishers had printed the letterpress in an octavo or quarto form and sold the illustrations as a separate volume, my own experience makes me think that they would, from a business point of view, have been equally well repaid; whilst a much larger edition of the letterpress might have been produced and sold with great advantage to the ornithological world.

I must congratulate Captain Beebe on the way in which, when he had determined on his monograph, he started on a long journey to some of the most remote parts of Asia with the object of seeing for himself in nature as many as possible of the birds, which the monographer of the past was content to study in museums only; and though this personal knowledge has, perhaps, led him to attach importance in some cases to more minute and possibly variable characters than he would otherwise have done, yet, as these questions of

local variation must always remain a matter of personal opinion, it does not much matter how we regard these points. I should like, however, to call attention to the perhaps unnecessary subdivision of the genus *Ithagenes*, and will begin by asking why he calls them "Blood Partridges" and not, as Indian ornithologists and sportsmen have hitherto done, "Blood Pheasants"? *Perdix* is a name which in various Latin tongues (*Perdrix* in French, *Perdice* in Italian, *Perdiz* in Spanish, and *Partridge* in English) is thoroughly understood in all countries where true Partridges are found; and though in Africa it has been applied in ignorance by colonists to various Francolins, and in North America to some Grouse, it has no proper application to any member of the *Phasianinæ*; and it might easily lead American naturalists to suppose that *Ithagenes* had some resemblance in habits, plumage, or structure to the true Partridges, which so far as I know it has not. Captain Beebe's reasons for this classification, as given in the Introduction, seem to me too slight. On p. xxv he says:—"The first two groups of birds which I have included in the present work, the Blood Partridges and Tragopans, judged by the tail-moult and other characters as well, are on the Quail and Partridge side of the line, but I have included them as representing the genera most nearly allied to the Pheasants." Now it may be objected that such a trifling secondary character as the moult of the tail-feathers is not a sufficient basis on which to define the subfamily *Phasianinæ*. I should be the last to criticise such a course, because in revising the butterflies of the genus *Parnassius* (P. Z. S. 1886) I founded, on a secondary sexual character which is only developed in the act of reproduction, a new subfamily to include them; and if no better characters can be found, I see no reason to reject the classification. But with regard to the separation of the Sikkim *Ithagenes* from the one inhabiting central Nepal, which Captain Beebe has done on what I think very insufficient evidence, I entirely agree with the remarks of Mr. Stuart Baker (*Ibis*, 1915, p. 124); and with an intimate personal knowledge of the Blood Pheasant in Sikkim, I am able to

confirm his opinion, which Captain Beebe quotes without any argument to show why he dissents from it. With regard to *I. tibetanus*, it seems to me very doubtful whether Mr. Stuart Baker, who described it on a single specimen brought by Captain Molesworth, was justified in considering it as a good species, having regard to the amount of variation which exists in *I. cruentus*; and I should be disposed to reserve an opinion on these races, until a much larger series of specimens are obtained from the mountains east and north-east of Sikkim, which until Bailey and Morshead's journey (*cf.* Geographical Magazine, xliii. p. 184) were almost *terra incognita*, and which are likely to remain unexplored for many years, unless the policy of the Indian government in these regions is changed. Captain Beebe may retort by asking why I in 1881 founded the description of a new species of Eared Pheasant, *Crossoptilon harmani*, on a single imperfect skin; and I will confess that I would not do such a thing now. But as he has at the end of his volume treated of this variety, or local race, or species—for I care not which you call it—under the heading of “wild hybrids,” I should like to show that hybridity in this case seems impossible, and would be possible only if two species of *Crossoptilon* existed in regions near enough to each other for the two species to meet. I will not now go into details of all the points which Captain Beebe has brought forward on pp. 193–198 to support his view that *C. harmani*, *C. leucurum*, and *C. drougnii* are hybrids, but the map of Geographical Distribution of the genus opposite p. 158—though it cannot be taken as more than a suggestion based on very small knowledge of the region and even less of the birds in it—shows that *C. harmani* is the most westerly representative of the genus; and although the map, as coloured, leads one to suppose that its range is not far distant on the east from that of *C. tibetanus* or on the north from that of *C. auritum*, yet, so long as we have no evidence that these two species ever do come in contact, the question of hybridity can hardly arise. Hybrids in nature among birds are so rare, whilst intermediate forms are so common,

that the necessity for proof is increased. I should rather suggest that the variation in the plumage and number of tail-feathers in the genus, which Captain Beebe shows to exist, are analogous to the variation of colour in *Stercorarius crepidatus*, and in the male of *Machetes pugnax*; and until some proof is given that the species of this genus do meet and interbreed, I agree with Mr. Stuart Baker (*cf.* Journ. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. xxiv. 1916, p. 633). No doubt we shall have, when Captain Beebe comes to deal with the various races of the genus *Phasianus*, some case which will throw light on this difficult question; but except in the solitary case of the Chumba variety of the Impeyan Pheasant, which was described and accepted by such good naturalists as Marshall, Oates, and Sharpe as a distinct species, but which is now relegated to its proper place by ornithologists generally, I can think of no similar instance amongst the Phasianidæ.

Knowing as I do the great difficulties, both climatic and geographical, which are met with in observing the habits of the forest-haunting Pheasants in the dense rocky and inaccessible thickets which they love, I especially admire the skill and patience which Captain Beebe shows as a field-naturalist and observer; and the care which he has taken to select and quote from the existing accounts of the habits and life-history of the Pheasants makes his book an almost unique model for future monographers. His numerous photographs of their native haunts show great skill as a bird-watcher and add immensely to the interest and value of the work.

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V.—*On the Eclipse Plumage of Spermophila pileata.*

By F. E. BLAAUW, M.B.O.U.

I BOUGHT a living specimen of this rare little finch in a vegetable shop in Santos in Brazil in May 1911. It had no black cap and no rosy gloss on the lower back and sides, so that I thought that it was either a young bird or a female. I was assured that it was an adult male. I bought the bird,